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Social development: implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Follow-up to the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 63/152 on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly. The report provides a substantive overview of the discussions held on the priority theme "Social integration" during the forty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development. It examines the impact of the current global crises on social development and social integration. The report also addresses the social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and concludes with a set of recommendations deriving from the deliberations of the Commission.

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I. Introduction

1. As part of the follow-up to the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, and in compliance with its two-year implementation cycle, the Commission for Social Development chose "Social integration" as its priority theme for the 2009-2010 review and policy sessions. The review segment of the Commission's forty-seventh session, held in February 2009, identified challenges and strategies for promoting social integration. As mandated by the Economic and Social Council, the outcome of the review session was in the form of a chairperson's summary.[1]

2. The present report reflects on the key issues discussed by the Commission in the context of social integration and in relation to poverty eradication and full employment and decent work for all, taking into consideration the chairperson's summary of the deliberations of the Commission and the report of the Secretary-General on promoting social integration, which was submitted to the Commission at its forty-seventh session (E/CN.5/2009/2), as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 63/152. The report also addresses a range of issues pertinent to the impact of the current global crises on social development and social integration. It highlights the social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, as well as the report of the Secretary-General on the social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (E/CN.5/2009/3), and concludes with a number of recommendations that emanated from the debate.

II. Review of the substantive discussions held during the forty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development on the priority theme "Social integration"

A. The importance of social integration for social development

Concept of social integration

3. The World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly identified the objective of social integration as creating "a society for all". The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action[2] saw social integration as both a goal and a dynamic process that societies engage in to advance social development. In more specific terms, social integration could be defined as a process of promoting the values, relations and institutions essential for the creation of an equitable and socially cohesive society where all individuals, regardless of their race, gender, language, culture or religion, can exercise their rights and responsibilities on an equal basis with others and contribute to society.[3]

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[1] See http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd/2009_summaries.html.

[2] *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution I, annexes I and II.

[3] See the report of the Expert Group Meeting on Promoting Social Integration, held in Helsinki from 8 to 10 July 2008, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/social/meetings/egm6_social_integration/social_integration.html.

4. Social integration is a prerequisite for fostering a stable, safe, harmonious, peaceful and just society. It is based on promoting and protecting all human rights and fundamental freedoms and aims at non-discrimination, respect for human dignity, promotion of a culture of peace, tolerance and non-violence, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity and participation of all in society. Social integration does not imply a notion of assimilation or coerciveness but rather aims to create an inclusive society in which diversity is not only accommodated but also respected, and each individual has an active role to play in furthering societal development.[4]

5. Such an inclusive society should be equipped with appropriate policies, mechanisms and institutions that enable people to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. In this regard, the engagement of multiple stakeholders, including civil society organizations and vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, is crucial so that their voices can be heard. This inclusiveness of society creates and maintains stability, along with a readiness to embrace change when necessary. Disregard for social integration may perpetuate inequality and exclusion and lead to social tensions, violence, conflicts and social disintegration. It prevents individuals from reaching their full potential and making meaningful contributions to society.

6. Despite its importance, progress in the implementation of the agenda of social integration is mixed, partly because of the difficulty in translating this multidimensional concept into concrete policy-oriented actions. Worldwide, income inequality is growing, while many individuals and social groups remain marginalized and excluded in many countries. Discrimination and other human rights violations also remain a major concern in many countries. The ongoing global crises, which are further straining the social fabric, highlight the critical importance of social integration. At this critical juncture, the commitment of Governments to promoting social integration should be revitalized, and renewed efforts should be made to accelerate its implementation.

Concepts related to social integration

7. While social integration is one of the core themes put forward by the World Summit for Social Development, there are other important concepts related to social integration, namely, social inclusion/exclusion and social cohesion. The concept of social inclusion has been used with increased frequency, both in intergovernmental debate and in policymaking (see E/CN.5/2009/2). Social and economic inclusion is increasingly recognized as a key to achieving social integration goals. It aims at providing equal access and opportunities for all in multiple areas, in particular health care, education, housing, full employment and decent work.

8. Contrary to that, social exclusion refers to a process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from fully participating in various aspects of social, cultural, political and economic activity on the grounds of their social identities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, culture or language, and physical, economic and social disadvantages.

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[4] See *Participatory Dialogue: Towards a Stable, Safe and Just Society for All* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 07.IV.3).

9. Social cohesion refers to the elements that bring and hold people together in society and can be understood as the willingness of individuals to cooperate and work together at all levels of society to achieve collective goals. In practical terms, social cohesion denotes the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding marginalization, to manage differences and divisions (see E/CN.5/2009/2). In a socially cohesive society, social bonds are strong and all individuals and groups have a sense of belonging, recognition, legitimacy and shared values that help to reduce inequalities in wealth, income and human relations.

10. There are no single agreed definitions for social inclusion/exclusion or social cohesion, and these concepts are often applied in the context of specific conditions of each society. While there is no "one size fits all" approach for promoting social integration at the regional, national and local levels, there are many creative ways to develop policies and programmes that advance the agenda of social integration.

11. Some recent regional developments are noteworthy. For instance, in February 2009 the African Common Position on Social Integration, along with the Social Policy Framework for Africa and the Windhoek Declaration on Social Development, were endorsed by the African Union. Acknowledging the prevailing marginalization and exclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, these documents encourage African Union member States to promote and accelerate a sustainable social development for the continent through more integrated social policies. In addition, the Council of Europe organized its first conference of ministers responsible for social cohesion in February 2009 in Moscow on the theme "Investing in social cohesion — investing in stability and the well-being of society".

B. The importance of social integration for poverty eradication and full employment and decent work for all

Poverty

12. Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, caused not only by economic but also by various other social, cultural and political factors. Efforts to reduce poverty and eradicate absolute poverty are closely associated with strategies to combat social exclusion and promote social integration. At the same time, poverty reduction and decent work can be seen as major pathways to social integration and greater inclusion.

13. Despite various commitments and efforts made at the international and national levels, poverty, inequality and social exclusion remain persistent in many countries. Even where overall progress has been achieved, there exist segments of the population, including older persons, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities, who have not benefited from the development gains attained in society as a whole.

14. Strong interlinkages exist between poverty and social exclusion. Often, poverty is seen as a particular form of social exclusion or an accumulation of different forms of exclusion. Poverty is manifested not only by material deprivation but also by a lack of recognition and dignity; inadequate access to employment, education, health services and justice; and a lack of voice and political representation. Those experiencing chronic poverty are largely excluded from

participating in social, economic, cultural and political activities, often being cut off from social connections and formal economic and social networks and institutions. As a result, they become locked into exploitative power relationships that deepen their exclusion.

15. Discrimination in its various forms often underpins poverty and raises barriers to social integration. Despite existing laws and policies, it is often the societal norms, traditional customs and practices and mindsets of people that maintain stereotypes, prejudices and exclusionary behaviours. Various social groups, including older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and migrants and their families, suffer from multiple disadvantages and are more likely to live in poverty and exclusion.

16. More systemic analysis is required to identify the multiple causes of poverty, inequality and social exclusion, along with the composition and location of those groups that are excluded and marginalized. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, women, especially those living in rural areas, are often excluded from basic education, land ownership, credit markets and employment, which in many instances leads to further social exclusion and the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Understanding the nature of existing barriers to their access and effective participation is, therefore, of particular importance to prevent marginalization that leads to even further social exclusion.

17. Social integration entails promoting a people-centered approach to poverty eradication. This requires empowering people living in poverty by involving them in the planning, design, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies and programmes. Their participation should be considered not as an add-on element but rather as central to poverty reduction efforts, so that these strategies and programmes can be designed in a way that respects the dignity and culture of people living in poverty, uses their skills, knowledge and creativity and assists them to organize and become educated about their rights.

18. The social integration of persons living in poverty should begin with meeting their basic human needs, including nutrition, health, water and sanitation, housing and access to education and employment. At the same time, societies should make every effort to empower people so that they can break the poverty cycle. In particular, education is key to empowering poor and other marginalized groups. Education expands significantly the range of choices available to persons living in poverty. Through education and training, persons living in poverty can develop the skills necessary to take advantage of better employment opportunities and work conditions, gain a better understanding of their rights and access to legal information and the court system, and participate more fully in all aspects of economic, social and cultural life. Access to health care also significantly improves the quality of life of persons living in poverty, particularly in those developing countries where infectious diseases and malnutrition afflict the lives of millions, including children, pregnant women and older persons. Improving access to basic services is, therefore, an important element in promoting social integration.

Productive employment, decent work and social integration

19. Creating productive employment and decent work opportunities is central to social integration. Productive employment that pays decent wages is a principal route out of poverty and an important instrument for social inclusion and the

empowerment of both individuals and social groups. Access to productive employment and decent work for all is critical to building an inclusive society. Sufficient job creation is necessary to absorb a growing workforce into the labour market. Increased investment and enhanced economic growth help create employment opportunities. The framework for employment creation and growth and social inclusion should incorporate investment policies and pro-growth macroeconomic policies — investment in physical, productive and social infrastructure, including education and skills development, particularly for young people; entrepreneurship and the promotion of sustainable enterprises; and the expansion of universal social protection.

20. In many countries, there is a shift towards more informal, casual and contractual employment. While this trend has increased insecurity and instability in general, many may face further vulnerability due to social exclusion. Although the prospect of bringing informal workers into the formal economy remains a long-term goal, in the short term there should be efforts to extend some of the protections that are afforded to workers in the formal economy to those in the informal economy, including the provision of social protection.

21. Research has shown that it is possible to provide social protection to people engaged in the informal economy without jeopardizing budget sustainability. The International Labour Organization has developed tool kits under its Strategies and Tools against Social Exclusion and Poverty (STEP) programme. STEP is a global programme of the ILO Social Security Department focusing on the poor and excluded populations in the informal economy and the rural sector. STEP works in two interconnected fields: the extension of social security in health and integrated approaches to fighting against social exclusion at the local level. Among the pioneering approaches of STEP, its work on the development of community-based social protection schemes, e.g., microinsurance and mutual health organizations, has been hailed as a promising initiative for poor populations excluded from formal systems, particularly in the least developed countries. STEP has also created an innovative electronic platform called CIARIS (Language and Resources Centre on Social Inclusion), which connects people, experts and resources in order to better combat social exclusion and poverty.

22. Eliminating discrimination in the workplace is equally important to promote social integration. Active labour market policies, such as the creation of public employment programmes, can play an important role in addressing discrimination, especially for the long-term unemployed or those with multiple barriers to employment. Exclusion from employment due to discrimination based on one's background or characteristics such as age also persists in many countries. People from marginalized groups often have fewer opportunities to acquire the skills necessary for well-paid jobs, as a result of negative stereotyping. Once employed, they also face barriers to promotion and other career development opportunities. Labour policies that promote social inclusion should be based on non-discriminatory practices and designed to improve access for all to education and training and the acquisition of new skills and lifelong learning.

23. In a globalized economy, it is imperative to develop or extend social protection systems in order to enable disadvantaged groups and individuals to seize job opportunities created by technological advances and demographic changes. Education and skills training are crucial for making people employable, allowing

them to gain access to decent work and escape poverty and promoting social inclusion and greater equity in society. Investing in human resources and expanding access to job opportunities are, therefore, key components in promoting social integration and inclusion. Expanding access to job opportunities would require cooperation among government agencies, apex bodies representing the private sector and civil society organizations, including labour unions.

24. The agricultural sector and rural areas, where a significant share of the poor in most of the developing world continues to live and work, require increased attention. Decent work deficits tend to be severe in rural areas, and access to social protection is extremely limited. Agriculture and rural development are essential for promoting rural employment and social inclusion. Focusing on employment-intensive rural development that benefits the poor is crucial.

25. Given the increase in urbanization and the rise in the number of urban slum-dwellers, added attention must also be paid to improving the social integration of these disadvantaged individuals. Many of them are working in the informal economy in low-paying, unproductive and often hazardous occupations, such as urban waste pickers and street vendors. Efforts to improve the pay and working conditions of these informal workers through, for example, raising the productivity of the self-employed and through the formation of cooperatives or labour unions, are central to bringing them into the mainstream of society.

C. Social groups

26. No social group is inherently vulnerable, and all social groups have some level of heterogeneity. However, there are social groups in society that face particular challenges to social integration. Working towards their integration, bearing in mind that each social group consists of individuals with diverse backgrounds, requires identifying and addressing specific obstacles faced by different groups in society. Since the World Summit for Social Development, notable progress has been made in addressing and promoting the social integration of certain social groups through the adoption of international instruments such as the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has also played a momentous role in promoting the participation of women in all aspects of public and private life.

27. While progress has been made in building important foundations for minimizing exclusion and addressing the specific needs of women and key social groups, such as older persons, youth, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples, this has not been sufficient to achieve the broad goal of social integration endorsed by the World Summit. Beyond helping social groups to gain access to the larger society, social integration requires a paradigm shift in order to transform those social norms, principles and institutions that underpin unequal relations and effectively counter such ills as racism, sexism and ageism.

28. Furthermore, there are various other groups and individuals in society, including ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic groups; the working poor; the rural and urban poor; migrants; children in poor households; single parents; persons affected by stigmatized illnesses, including HIV/AIDS; and internally displaced

persons, that face specific challenges of integration. It is important to recognize that they typically face social, economic, cultural and environmental barriers that impede their access and opportunity to effectively participate in all aspects of society on an equal basis with others. Society has a responsibility to reduce those barriers, through acknowledging and promoting the intrinsic dignity and rights of all human beings. Beyond effectively incorporating their needs and concerns into social and economic development policies and strategies, those social groups must be included as equal partners in all stages of development.

29. At the same time, it has to be recognized that not all social groups in society are necessarily looking to be mainstreamed or "integrated". For example, past attempts to integrate indigenous peoples into a larger society often resulted in forced assimilation or inclusion under inferior conditions. Therefore, social integration strategies must focus on transforming society to respect diversity and accommodate people with different backgrounds, so that they can be active members of society, with equal access to opportunities and political participation, while maintaining their ethnic and cultural identities.

Youth

30. While young people are generally perceived as a vibrant generation full of potential, they also face real threats of social exclusion. In addition to factors leading to exclusion among all age groups, youth continue to face discrimination based on their age. Millions of young people continue to be illiterate, in spite of the fact that secondary education is becoming the minimum level of qualification required for finding decent employment in a globalized economy. The unemployment rates of young people are two to three times higher than those of adults, largely due to their lack of work experience, skills and personal networks.

31. Among youth, girls and young women often face additional barriers to social inclusion based on their age and gender. Young mothers, especially teenage mothers, are particularly vulnerable to being excluded, since early pregnancy often carries a stigma and forces the mother to drop out of school or discontinue working if adequate and affordable childcare facilities are unavailable. Young migrants and youth with migrant backgrounds also often experience difficulties in being integrated into education systems or competing with others in labour markets.

32. In promoting the social integration of young people, improved access and opportunities for basic education and skills and training are essential. It is also critical that national development frameworks have a comprehensive approach to the productive and decent employment of young people. In addition, it is important to enable the effective participation of young people in decision-making processes, as exclusion and the perception of neglect can push them to engage in crime and illegal activities and thus become disenfranchised from societal life.

33. To achieve this goal, several frameworks have been developed, notably the World Programme of Action for Youth, and several regional frameworks, such as the African Youth Charter, the European Youth Pact and the Ibero-American Convention on Youth Rights. While they have been instrumental in guiding the formulation and implementation of national youth policies, these frameworks are not equipped with mechanisms to monitor the progress made so far (see A/62/61/Add.1, para. 4). In this regard, the specific goals and time-bound targets presented in previous reports

of the Secretary-General[5] may be useful to provide additional means to assess national progress.

34. The Youth Employment Network is an important inter-agency initiative of the United Nations system to address and monitor youth unemployment and underemployment. National action plans on youth employment promoted under the aegis of the Youth Employment Network provide a framework for an integrated approach to countering the problems of youth unemployment, focusing on employment, employability, entrepreneurship and equal opportunity.

Older persons

35. Even though the world is ageing at an ever-increasing pace, older persons continue to be sidelined from the mainstream of society. Whereas the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing called for a "society for all ages", achieving the goal of having older persons treated as active participants in society is still far away.

36. Overall, older persons continue to be excluded from full participation in political, social, economic and cultural areas of societal life in many countries. The barriers that preclude the inclusion of older persons are fairly universal: poverty, poor health, low educational levels and lack of transportation and access to services. Negative stereotypes about old age and overt or subtle age discrimination remain prevalent. This is not to say that older persons as a group are all vulnerable and subject to social exclusion. There are many very active older persons who fully participate in society. However, in many instances, particularly in developing countries that have experienced demographic transition, with an increasing number of older persons in the population, economic vulnerability and social exclusion are all too common.

37. Experience shows that a first step towards empowering older persons to become full and active participants in society lies in taking legislative measures to guarantee their basic rights and to prevent violence and abuse against them. Legislative measures can range from guaranteeing equal access to health care to ensuring basic economic security to assuring the participation of older persons in important decisions that affect their lives. In many instances, however, current legislation is not fully implemented and falls far short of achieving these objectives. This is likely to remain the case unless ageing concerns are mainstreamed into existing policy priorities, rather than treated as peripheral or sectoral issues.

38. In this light, ageing should be viewed as part of a normal human life course and not as a condition that separates older persons from the rest of society. Older persons can be caregivers and may need to be cared for. They can be recipients of benefits such as pensions and health care as well as key contributors to the economy, performing valuable services, both paid and unpaid. In sum, ageing issues will be addressed most effectively when they are viewed in a more socially integrated manner, one that acknowledges and values the integral role of older persons within the wider community.

[5] See A/64/61-E/2009/3, A/62/61/Add.1-E/2007/7/Add.1 and the *Guide to the National Implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.IV.11).

D. Strategies to promote social integration

39. Advancing economic and social integration requires well-coordinated and coherent public policies, along with long-term national strategies for promoting growth with equity and social justice. The promotion of economic integration entails broad support for the productive employment and decent work agenda and redistributive measures that enhance people's access to economic opportunities.

40. Social integration requires adopting inclusive policies aimed at preventing and redressing the different forms of exclusion. Different types of exclusion call for distinct forms of intervention. Moreover, various social groups, such as older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous people, suffer from multiple disadvantages and are more likely to live in poverty and exclusion. That is why focusing on specific groups and promoting their inclusion through universal access to services and opportunities is often regarded as an effective way to tackle poverty. At the same time, more targeted affirmative action programmes may be advanced, without reducing the opportunities for others, in order to help the marginalized sections of society that have been lagging behind. This makes sustainable and equitable economic growth an imperative for national development strategies.

41. It is generally agreed that social integration policies should address physical security, including health and food security; human resources investments, such as in education and health; social protection measures; social capital investments; and specific policies aimed at the equalization of opportunities for all.

42. Ultimately, policymakers need to articulate and implement socially transformative policies so that the socially excluded and marginalized become part of the society they live in and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and exclusion. Among such transformative policies, investing in and improving access to health and education have great potential to break the cycle by closing gaps in education and health outcomes for disadvantaged groups.

43. Strong political leadership and commitment are required to advance social integration. While Governments are primarily responsible for achieving the goal of social integration, the successful implementation of socially inclusive strategies rests on the entire society. That is why measures to strengthen participatory democracy, including mobilizing public opinion and engaging civil society organizations, are critical to fostering social cohesion.

Ways and means to reduce barriers to social integration

44. Formulating socio-economic policies that effectively protect vulnerable populations is necessary to promote social integration. Such policies should have both long- and short-term objectives. However, for socially inclusive policies to take hold, society must be bound by a social contract, a sense of belonging and a willingness to support others in times of need, in addition to the trust of citizens in institutions.

Social justice, equality, non-discrimination and inclusive education

45. Ensuring social justice and equality of all people, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, forms the basis for an inclusive society. The principles of social justice are a prerequisite for such a society, where every

individual and group is entitled to fair and equal treatment, has equal access to rights, fulfils his or her responsibilities and shares the benefits produced by society. Institutions that promote the principles and values of social justice should be put in place in every society.

46. Anti-discrimination measures are also important for advancing equality, equity and social justice. Such measures include enacting and implementing appropriate laws and regulations to combat racism, all forms of discrimination, religious intolerance and xenophobia. While enacting legislative measures is the first step to be taken, also important is a careful review of existing laws and regulations for bias or discrimination against some members of society and amending them as necessary. In addition, other measures that promote tolerance, mutual respect and the value of diversity should be encouraged, for example through educational curricula and inclusive education that advances respect for difference and combats prejudice and racial and other stereotypes.

Social protection

47. Social protection is an effective tool for addressing both the causes and symptoms of vulnerability and structural inequality while meeting the immediate and basic needs of the poor and excluded for sustaining their livelihoods. Social protection is also critical to protecting individuals and families from falling into poverty, particularly during economic downturns.

48. Ideally, social protection systems should be universal, adequate, adaptable, efficient and financially sustainable, and they should mitigate potential short- and long-term social risks, such as sickness, old age and disability, in addition to economic risks, such as unemployment. Social protection programmes should promote independence, facilitate the integration or reintegration of people excluded from economic activity and prevent social isolation and stigmatization. Social protection should, therefore, be seen as an investment in people and also as an effective instrument for reducing income inequality and poverty and advancing social inclusion.

49. As each country has different needs and concerns, social protection systems need to be designed to give full consideration to country-specific conditions while maximizing their effectiveness. Universal basic social protection can be affordable enough in most developing countries to provide minimum social coverage for all vulnerable people.

50. The calculations of ILO show that a basic social security floor — to provide universal coverage, adapted to meet specific country needs and possibilities — is a feasible goal within a reasonable time frame. ILO is working on a set of minimum guarantees consisting of income security for children, the elderly and the disabled, social assistance through employment guarantees for the active population and access to essential health care that can be part of a wider social floor combining cash transfers and essential services. Such a global social protection floor would strengthen the protection pillar of the decent work agenda while stimulating consumption and economic growth.

Family policy

51. The family, as the basic unit of society and in its educative role during child-rearing, is vital to the promotion of social integration and social cohesion. Family policies need to be strengthened to fully enable families to fulfil this role. Special efforts also need to be made to integrate marginalized families, increase the access of families to basic services and more effectively promote the social integration of children and youth, particularly those from disadvantaged and vulnerable families. To further family well-being, it is important to integrate a family perspective into all areas of policymaking, including health care, the work environment and the tax code.

52. The preparation for the upcoming twentieth anniversary in 2014 of the International Year of the Family provides an occasion for the continued promotion and implementation of the mandated objectives of the International Year of the Family and of the integration of a family perspective into policymaking and development.

Volunteerism

53. Volunteerism is increasingly seen as a powerful means to engage people in tackling development challenges, transform the nature of development and enhance the cohesion of society. In this context, volunteerism has an important role in promoting social integration. Volunteerism serves to lift the lives of those who are excluded and marginalized by combating feelings of personal isolation, enhancing confidence and feelings of self-esteem, challenging stereotyping and offering opportunities to acquire skills, knowledge and networks that enable people to change their environment and themselves.

54. While the potential of volunteerism as a force for meeting national development goals is beginning to be recognized, the concept of volunteerism as a means of creating more cohesive societies has so far rarely been expressed in national policy discourse. However, volunteerism has already contributed to developing social capital for various social groups, including youth, older persons, women and persons with disabilities. Volunteerism provides disadvantaged social groups, in particular disenfranchised or marginalized youth, with opportunities for dialogue and inclusion and contributes to strengthening intergenerational solidarity through participation in community activities.

55. Volunteerism also offers marginalized individuals opportunities to acquire the skills necessary for entering the job market and paves the way to leadership roles through participation in capacity-building activities at the international, regional, national and local levels. Advances in information and communication technologies also extend the potential of volunteerism, such as online volunteering, which allows effective North-South and South-South contributions to development. Volunteering should be regarded as part of the basic fabric of well-functioning societies and, therefore, as a necessary element for promoting social integration.

III. Impact of the current global crises on social development and social integration

56. The global financial and economic crises, volatile food and energy prices and climate change pose threats to advances made in social development in recent years. They will have major negative implications for social development, and for social integration in particular. They also call for additional efforts to prevent people from falling into poverty in addition to those efforts aimed at lifting people out of poverty.

57. Increases in global food and energy prices in the first half of 2008 led to food protests in many developing countries and caused some countries to impose export restrictions. Many poor countries are net importers of food and energy and saw their import bills balloon in 2008. People living in poverty, especially the poorest of the poor, were hit the hardest by rising prices. The second half of 2008 saw the start of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. While most developed economies are expected to be in a deep recession in 2009, a vast majority of developing countries are experiencing a sharp reversal in the robust growth registered in the period from 2002 to 2007. Recovery may take months, or even years, to occur. This situation threatens to reverse progress towards the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

58. These crises are unfolding against the background of the longer-term predicament of climate change. Climate change is likely to lead to new patterns of infectious disease outbreaks, new diseases resulting from ecosystem changes and changes in vector-borne diseases such as malaria. This poses new challenges to public health systems. Climate change, manifested in the increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters and extreme weather patterns, is having an impact on agriculture and food production and exacerbating the food crisis.

59. The confluence of crises on multiple fronts has created a global environment of diminished growth prospects with a high degree of uncertainty. At present, the impact of these crises on economic growth, employment, poverty and hunger is turning out to be worse than even the most pessimistic predictions.

60. The poorest countries will be the hardest hit by the global crises, and the poorest households, which spend the largest portion of their income on food, are or will be disproportionately hurt by high food prices and falling incomes. The number of people suffering from hunger is also increasing.

61. Contraction of economic activity is expected to lead to significantly higher levels of unemployment and worsening labour market conditions for workers, who had been facing increasing economic insecurity even during the period of robust economic growth. Initial projections put the rise in unemployment at 50 million over the next two years, but, as the situation continues to deteriorate, this number could easily double, according to ILO. Lessons from past financial crises indicate that it typically takes four to five years after economic recovery has set in for unemployment rates to return to pre-crisis levels.

62. Slowing, or even negative, economic growth with volatile commodity prices will put great downward pressure on the real wages of workers. While the economic downturn will take a considerable toll on employment throughout the world, certain

groups, such as migrants, youth, women, older persons and indigenous peoples, are particularly vulnerable. Unemployment and lower wages, in combination with volatile food and energy prices, are adding tens of millions to the ranks of poor people worldwide.

63. According to the report on the world economic situation and prospects as of mid-2009 (E/2009/73), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates that between 73 million and 103 million more people will remain poor or fall into poverty in comparison with a situation in which pre-crisis growth continued. Most of this setback will be felt in East and South Asia, with between 56 million and 80 million likely to be affected, of whom about half are in India. The crisis could keep 12 million to 16 million more people in poverty in Africa and another 4 million in Latin America and the Caribbean.

64. People living in poverty have few coping mechanisms. They cope with higher food prices by consuming less and by eating less nutritious foods. Food price hikes in 2007-2008 have pushed an estimated 100 million more people into poverty. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that world hunger will reach more than 1 billion people in 2009, an all-time high. Poor people also have less money available to spend on health, since a higher portion of their income goes to purchasing food. High food prices lead to poorer nutritional status and lower weight of children. Stunted, underweight children will face lifelong negative health and productivity consequences.

65. The fallout from the crises will lead to a higher demand for social services and assistance, but public expenditure on social protection faces tight budget constraints, owing to declining government revenue. This is likely to result in increasing inequality, as the impacts of the crisis and cuts in public expenditure would disproportionately affect low-income people. Policy measures aimed at promoting social development could fall victim to the financial crisis as well.

66. Economic hardship threatens social cohesion, and rising social tensions can potentially lead to increases in social unrest and violence. Interpersonal violence and violence against women are linked to economic stresses in communities and families. These pose great challenges to promoting social integration. Economic hardship also leads to scapegoating of certain social groups, such as migrants. They not only become targets for attacks but are also among the first to lose jobs and the last to get jobs.

67. National Governments and the international community should take a comprehensive and coordinated approach to finding a solution to the current crises. Priority attention needs to be given to alleviating the adverse effects of the crises on the poor and on disadvantaged social groups, and such policies should take national circumstances into consideration.

68. Mitigating the impact of the crises on social development will require the creation of comprehensive and consistent short- and long-term social and economic policies, which are recognized to be mutually reinforcing. Reducing social spending may be tempting in the short run, but the long-term implications would likely be counterproductive. Therefore, reductions in social spending should be avoided. At the same time, the cost of social protection and social provision is not as high as it appears, as there are synergies among various aspects of social development. For example, expenditure on basic education improves health outcomes and hence

reduces expenditure needs in the health sector. Education and better health improves productivity and helps ease the strain on budgets.

69. However, it should be kept in mind that, even before the advent of the global financial and economic crises, many countries had been hard-pressed to tackle emerging social challenges, such as growing income inequality, increased migration, rapid and uncontrolled urbanization, ageing populations, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the break-up of family structures, all of which pose particular challenges to social integration. In developing countries, a lack of investment in the agriculture sector has created a large development gap between urban and rural areas. As a result, many rural habitants are moving into large cities, leading to an expansion of urban slums, a large number of unemployed and deteriorating security.

70. To counter the negative impact of the current global crises, preservation of employment and decent work opportunities should be a priority; jobs, once lost, are extremely difficult to regain. Skills training appropriate to the labour market should be expanded. Combining working time flexibility with training is one strategy to achieve skills development and labour market consistency while retaining jobs.

71. Social protection makes a critical contribution towards meeting the development goal of poverty eradication and making a positive impact on economic growth, social cohesion and social development. Basic social protection, including social and health services and income security, help people to cope with crises and to avoid irreversible losses in their productive assets and human capital, especially in a period of economic slowdown and great uncertainty. A practical approach should be taken to extend basic social protection, based on country-specific conditions, with the active participation of all stakeholders.

72. Cooperation and coordination at the international level is imperative to combat the effects of the global crises. Official development assistance commitments should not be neglected as a result of the inevitable consideration of rising needs for social assistance in donor countries during a time of financial and economic crisis. Developed countries need to look at global social justice as beneficial to all and strive to meet their commitment to provide financial and technical support to developing countries in achieving the internationally agreed development goals.

73. The current crises call for significant reform of the international financial architecture and the governance of the global economic system. Sufficient regulation of financial institutions is needed. Restructuring the international financial system should be an inclusive process.

IV. Social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development

74. Investing in the special social development needs of Africa constitutes a commitment to fairness and to more effective public policy and better governance. It also creates the social cohesion that is needed for long-term economic growth and the improvement of the human condition.

75. The New Partnership for Africa's Development's (NEPAD) priority areas that focus on fostering peace, security and good governance and investing in agriculture, health, education, infrastructure development, trade and the environment therefore

offer African countries renewed hope and opportunity to focus on the multidimensional needs of disadvantaged social groups.

76. NEPAD provides African States the opportunity to adopt and implement country-owned multisectoral policies that can enhance the voice, participation and empowerment of all members of society. Such policies include increasing access to quality schools and primary health-care facilities, agricultural inputs, water and sanitation, better infrastructure and participation in national and local decision-making processes. If fully implemented, these endeavours will result in improvements in the human condition, particularly in life expectancy, education and infant and maternal mortality. Better nutrition resulting from increased agricultural productivity will also raise both farm and non-farm productivity, while the improved management of the environment, trade and regional cooperation will contribute to fostering stronger economic growth.

77. To strengthen regional efforts aimed at addressing social issues, the African Union, at its twelfth Summit, held in Addis Ababa from 26 January to 3 February 2009, endorsed the recommendations of the first session of the African Union Conference of Ministers in Charge of Social Development, in particular the Social Policy Framework for Africa, the Windhoek Declaration on Social Development and the African Common Position on Social Integration (see A/63/848, annex I, p. 26). The Social Policy Framework places poverty eradication, agriculture, gender equality, employment creation, social protection, primary health care, education, HIV/AIDS, ageing, disability, environmental sustainability, the family, indigenous culture, civil strife and conflicts, and disaster prevention as core social development issues in Africa. In sum, the Framework sets out a sustainable social development vision for African societies that is based on social justice, social inclusion and freedom from poverty, hunger and discrimination.

78. The recommendations captured in this strategic vision are aimed at fostering a development agenda that is centered on the empowerment and well-being of the people of Africa, in societies that are safe, inclusive, just and equal. If successfully implemented, the Social Policy Framework for Africa will assist in minimizing the impact of the current global crises on vulnerable social groups. The Framework calls for the implementation of comprehensive social protection systems that include pensions, disability grants and improved access to health care and education while taking into account the unique circumstances of each country.

79. The Framework also looks at social policy not as welfare or as providing social safety nets, but rather as a major pillar of development — in keeping with the themes of the World Summit for Social Development. Such a view will ensure equitable and socially sustainable development across the continent. For this Social Policy Framework to be a reality, African Governments need to shoulder the primary responsibility of funding and implementing it. International development partners, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders should augment these efforts by honouring existing and new commitments.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

80. The World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly highlighted the importance of social integration. The goal of social integration is to bring all social groups and individuals into the political, social, cultural and economic structures of a society so that they can fully participate and contribute to its development. Yet, the persistence of social exclusion significantly impedes poverty reduction efforts and plagues economic growth and social development. That is why social inclusion must become a high priority for Governments, the international community and all those who have a stake in the development process. Additionally, peace and stability within society and among States may well depend on the success of socially inclusive policies that Member States pursue.

81. Whereas it is the responsibility of Governments to set up institutional arrangements at the national and local levels that facilitate social integration, working to promote social integration is an undertaking for the whole of society. The task of social integration should, therefore, be shared by all sectors of the economy and society at large, including the private sector and civil society organizations. The successful implementation of socially inclusive strategies eventually depends on the extent to which individuals and groups are aware of their rights and responsibilities and Governments are accountable and committed to social justice.

82. International efforts to advance social integration have largely focused on addressing the special needs of certain social groups, while at the national level many Governments have pursued policies aimed at combating exclusion, often with a focus on the most marginalized groups or individuals. Working towards inclusion requires a clear recognition of the specific obstacles faced by different groups in society. At the same time, the needs of specific groups must be addressed without stigmatizing them or overemphasizing their predicament, which could reinforce the fault lines in a society.

83. Despite the pronounced commitments to internationally agreed development goals, the promise to take action towards social integration remains largely unfulfilled, while at the same time economic trends associated with globalization have run counter to social integration in many parts of the world. The poor and marginalized have largely been excluded from the benefits of globalization, as recent employment trends have resulted in greater segmentation in the labour market, a situation that the current global crises are likely to aggravate and perpetuate. On the basis of the present report, the General Assembly may wish to consider the following recommendations set out below.

B. Recommendations

National level

84. Governments should develop socially inclusive policies and mainstream them into national development and poverty reduction strategies. Such policies

should be based on respect for diversity and a ban on forced assimilation. To achieve that, Governments may consider establishing an institutional focal point tasked with promoting and monitoring social integration.

85. Governments should actively pursue policies that explicitly prohibit discrimination against marginalized groups and individuals based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property and birth or other status and remove all discriminatory provisions from their national legal frameworks.

86. Governments should consider promoting full employment and decent work as central instruments for social and economic inclusion and poverty reduction, with particular attention to socially and economically marginalized groups.

87. Governments should design and implement comprehensive cross-sectoral social policies, including basic social protection schemes for both the formal and informal economy, as instruments to achieve equity, inclusion, stability and cohesion in their societies.

International level

88. The international community and donor Governments should pay particular attention to the needs of fragile societies, including those emerging from conflict, and to subregions at risk, in order to promote peacebuilding, social cohesion and constructive community relationships geared towards preventing and mitigating violent conflicts.

89. Regional intergovernmental entities are invited to facilitate the exchange of good policies and practices aimed at achieving equity, inclusion and cohesion.

90. The international community may reflect on the current group-specific mandates in order to identify the links and areas of convergence between them. The commonalities found in approaches to different vulnerable groups could form a basis for more effective implementation of those mandates.

91. The United Nations system is encouraged to develop a coherent system-wide approach to support national efforts for fostering social integration at the international, regional, national and local levels. In particular, the United Nations system and United Nations country teams should support national Governments in mainstreaming social integration objectives into development policies and plans and poverty reduction strategies and ensuring the participation of disadvantaged social groups in planning, implementation and monitoring processes, in collaboration with civil society, the private sector and other partners.

92. The international community and donor Governments should strive to maintain their commitments to meeting the demands for social services and assistance, including health services and income security, that have arisen from the global economic and financial crises, particularly among the poorest and most vulnerable.